

REMARKS

Claims 1, 3, 8-10, 14, and 15 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as unpatentable over JP 10-211005 in view of French et al. U.S. Patent 5,774,956. The Examiner provided a detailed discussion of the Japanese patent which was very helpful, as was his argument relating to the French patent and the combination of references.

In support of the rejection, the Examiner stated:

"The difference (between applicant's buckle and that of the Japanese reference) is that the front panel has a U-shaped aperture 54 and the aperture is not completely surrounded by the front panel. However, French et al. (figures 1, 6, 9) teaches buckle structure with a male part 12 having two resilient prongs 26, 28 having engaging bodies 30, 32 receivable in edge recesses 64, 66 of the female part 14 and a central cantilevered resilient member 34 having a manually controlled button 36 receivable in an aperture 48 that is completely surrounded by the front panel 46 (col. 3, lines 35-50) thereby providing easier manipulation by touch. It would have been obvious to modify the buckle of JP 10-211005 so that the aperture receiving the control button of the central cantilevered resilient member is completely surrounded by the front panel in view of French et al. (figures 1, 6, 9) teaching buckle structure with a male part 12 having two resilient prongs 26, 28 having engaging bodies 30, 32 receivable in edge recesses 64, 66 of the female part 14 and a central cantilevered resilient member 34 having a manually controlled button 36 receivable in an aperture 48 that is completely surrounded by the front panel 46 (col. 3, lines 35-50) thereby providing easier manipulation by touch."

A further study of the references made it clear that, in both the Japanese patent and the French et al. patent, the manually-controlled button (36 in the French et al. patent and 27 in the Japanese patent), actually latches to their respective female parts.

This is specifically set forth in the French et al. patent (col. 4, lines 58-67 and col. 5, lines 1-3). In the Japanese patent (Fig. 16), it seems quite clear that the manually-controlled button 27 latches over edge 54.

Applicant's button 30, by way of contrast, is accessible through opening 31 but is not in any respect locked or latched to the edges of opening 31. (See Fig. 2.) This is clearly stated in applicant's specification as filed on page 10, lines 16 and 17.

Thus, it appears that both the Japanese Patent and French et al. rely on their manually actuated button to provide a latching function to prevent tension on the associated belt from separating the male and female belt parts.

Claim 1 has been amended and recites that the resilient member in the aperture is "accessible for manual operation but free from latching engagement with the body portion of said female buckle part". This clearly distinguishes over the references, both structurally and functionally.

Claims 3, 8, 9, and 10 are all dependent or ultimately dependent upon claim 1 and believed allowable with claim 1.

Claim 14 has been amended similarly to claim 1 and now recites that the resilient member . . . (is) accessible for manual operation but free of latching engagement with said female part.

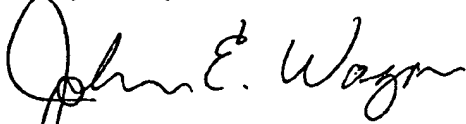
Claim 15 has been similarly amended and now recites said "button being accessible for manual operation but free from latching engagement with said female part".

Serial No. 09/370,388

Since each of the independent claims 1, 14, and 15 have been amended as described and distinguished from the cited references, it is believed that the application is in condition for allowance and favorable action is requested. Should the Examiner disagree, entry of the amendment is requested under the provisions of 37 C.F.R. 1.116 as putting the application in better form for appeal.

A *Petition for Extension of Time (Small Entity)* for two months and a \$210 check is enclosed.

Respectfully submitted,



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Enclosures: *Petition for Extension of Time (Small Entity)* and \$210 Check

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